



FRIDAY,

MAY 10, 2024

12:00 PM (ET)

302
INTERNATIONAL
CENTER
427 N SHAW LN,
EAST LANSING, MI
48824

SPONSORED BY:
CENTER FOR
EUROPEAN,
RUSSIAN, AND
EURASIAN STUDIES
(CERES)



CERES Brown Bag Talk

NAVIGATING HIERARCHY: A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC OMBUDS IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

Dr. Ursula Meiser

Ombudsperson Teaching and Doctoral Degree Studies
Office of the Rectorate, University of Stuttgart Germany;
Spokesperson of the German Ombuds Network *BeVeOm*; Vice-
President of the European Network of Ombuds in Higher
Education



Dr. Ryan Smith

Assistant University Ombudsperson, Michigan State University;
Board Member, European Network of Ombuds in Higher
Education; Co-Chair, ABA Section of Dispute Resolution
Ombuds Committee



The role of the ombuds (ombudsman, ombudsperson) can be found in academic spaces, as well as in government and other types of organizations. Academic ombuds play a unique role, serving as a neutral party to assist members of a university community as they navigate conflict, policy, and issues of fairness. This role looks different from one country and context to the next.

The nature of the academic environment leads to a prevalence of hierarchical structures. This hierarchy reflects stratification within organizations, which may also reflect and further perpetuate social and other forms of stratification externally. Hierarchy has been studied within organizations, and, to a lesser degree, within institutions of higher education. One of these models, Diefenback & Sillince (2011), examines the roles of both formal and informal hierarchy within institutions.

In our paper, we utilize the framework developed by Diefenback & Sillince (2011) to engage in comparative analysis between universities in Germany and the United States. From this discussion, we then provide recommendations and a “toolkit” to help ombuds and their visitors navigate these sometimes-complex spaces and dynamics. This framework also allows us to engage in a discussion around the nature of the academic ombuds in Germany and the United States.